Design Strategy for Canadian Passport Digital Services

Jan. 2019 - Jan. 2023

scenario

Historically, Canadians have only been able to apply for a passport by completing a paper form and submitting it to the Passport Program either by mail or by visiting a local passport office in person.

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), a department of the Government of Canada, is seeking to modernize and simplify how its citizens apply for travel documents.

To do this, IRCC launched the Passport Digital Services (PDS) initiative in 2018 with the objective of developing a pilot test of online application following a Design Thinking methodology.

IRCC's new PDS product team hired me to (1) help develop and drive its UX design strategy including all activities, UX deliverables, resourcing and timelines; and (2) manage the work of our product team's UX practitioners performing UX research and design activities.

project details

Client: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

My role: Design Lead

Deliverable: Pilot web application

Devices: Desktop, Tablet, Mobile

design activities

Design Strategy   Resource Management
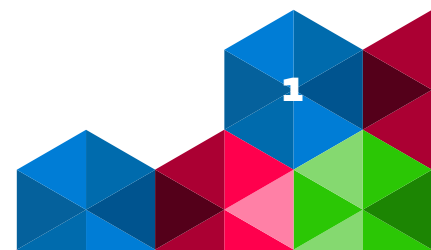
Design Operations   User Interviews

Concept Design   Interaction Design

Prototyping   Usability Testing

Accessibility

action

To deliver impactful experiences, any product team really needs to understand their users. So an impactful design strategy begins with sound UX research, and using the understanding gained to define the UX outcomes users are looking for. Once we have those outcomes defined, then we can design.

All told, however, here's a list of my main tasks:

• Established the PDS UX design strategy founded on continuous user-engagement;

• Instilled a culture of decision-making based on evidence gathered in through UX research;

• Continuously reviewed and monitored UX resourcing and competencies required to produce the project's key design deliverables; monitored UX resource performance;

• Supervised research activities performed by other resources or facilitated them myself as needed (in English and French);

• Leveraged insights gained from research activities to understand user context, define user needs, define UX outcomes, and inform prioritization of features;

• Drove definition of the product's UX success and progress metrics;

• Created and managed UX research strategy that included: analysis of user insights and service forecasts provided by various IRCC research teams when I arrived on the project; PDS concept testing; usability testing of prototypes; drafting a test strategy for Canadians with disabilities; gathering of pilot feedback;

• Performed research analysis, briefed product team members and management on insights gained from user research activities, and performed prioritization reviews of UX outcomes and PDS feature backlog based on evidence.

• Assessed prototyping needs throughout product design and development phases; and planned usability testing based on hypotheses to be tested with Canadians;

• Provided guidance to the PDS product team on integrating UX within Agile/SCRUM;

• Drafted UX research plan to engage commercial photographers, learn how they provide passport photos now, and assess the impact of a digital passport application (e.g. potentially requiring them to providing digital passport photos) to their business;
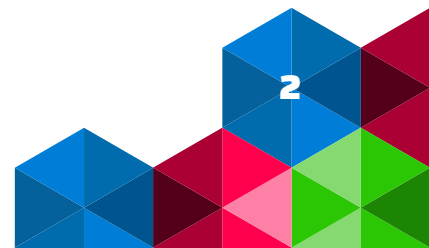
action

- Planned usability tests (draft required research objectives) for testing performed by IRCC's dedicated usability testing team;

- Advised the product team on accessibility requirements and inclusive design;

- Advised the product team on government design systems and guidelines;

- Collaborated regularly with other IRCC UX designers, UX researchers to ensure PDS alignment with other departmental design initiatives;

- Created and managed a research repository tracking quantitative and qualitative insights over time;

- Participated in Agile/SCRUM rituals (e.g. sprint planning, daily SCRUMs, playbacks and retrospectives) in development phases, sharing UX insights with team members to inform design and development;
- Provided regular progress reports and briefings to project management on UX design activities performed on the project, and reporting UX risks;

result

During the PDS Pilot, 89 Canadians were finally able to renew their passports without needing a paper form, having to go to a passport office. All said they would happily apply online again over going to their local passport office or mailing in a paper form

The PDS pilot also won praise from IRCC executives for its simplicity. Public servants (non-consultants) working on the PDS product team received IRCC's Operations sector's 2021 Project of the Year award. Our team also received accolades from peers at both the Canadian Government's internal design agency, the Canadian Digital Service (CDS), as well as IRCC's Client Insights Committee for performing design at an organizational maturity level that's rarely seen in Canadian Government.

next steps

My day-to-day role as design lead on the project ended formally in January, 2023. However, in May 2023, the Canadian Immigration Minister announced that an online application would be rolled out to all Canadians in the fall of 2023.
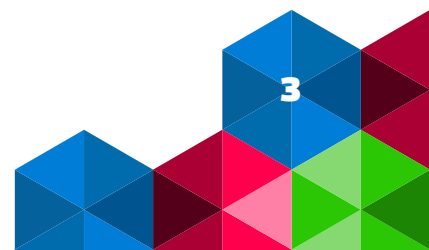
design with heart.
empower people.

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